

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Communicable Disease Control

Rubella (German measles)

What is rubella?

Rubella is caused by a virus and is characterized by slight fever, rash and swollen glands. Most cases are mild.

Who gets rubella?

In unvaccinated populations, rubella is primarily a childhood disease. However, large outbreaks have occurred in adolescents, colleges and young adult groups.

How is rubella spread?

Rubella is spread by sneezing or coughing or direct contact with nasal or throat secretions of infected individuals.

What are the symptoms of rubella?

Rubella is a mild illness which may present few or no symptoms. Symptoms may include a rash, slight fever, joint aches, headache, discomfort, runny nose and reddened eyes. The lymph nodes just behind the ears and at the back of the neck may swell causing some soreness and/or pain. The rash, which may be itchy, first appears on the face and progresses from head to foot, lasting about three days. As many as half of all rubella cases occur without a rash.

When and for how long is a person able to spread rubella?

Rubella may be transmitted from seven days before to four day; after onset of the rash, if present.

Does past infection with rubella make a person immune?

Yes. Immunity acquired after contracting the disease is usually permanent.

What is the vaccine for rubella?

All persons born after January 1, 1957 should receive two doses of measles mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine. Children should receive the first dose at 12-15 months of age and the second dose before school entry. Adults who lack documented proof of immunity against rubella should be vaccinated.

What can be the effect of not being immunized against rubella?

Rubella infection is dangerous because it can damage an unborn baby. Infection of a pregnant woman may result in a miscarriage, stillbirth or the birth of an infant with abnormalities which may include deafness, cataracts, heart defects, liver and spleen damage and mental retardation. Congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) occurs among at least 25 percent of infants born to women who have had rubella disease during the first trimester of pregnancy.

What can be done to prevent the spread of rubella?

Maintaining high levels of rubella immunization in the community is critical. Control of the spread of rubella is needed primarily to prevent damage to the unborn baby. Therefore, women of childbearing age should have their immunity determined and receive rubella vaccine if needed. Infected persons should not attend school or other events or gatherings during their infectious period.